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**From INERTIA to BEYOND: achieving cognitive engagement through  
international mobility or how we developed our students' talent by  
sending them away and bringing them back again.**

***A Working Paper***

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**Abstract**

This working paper outlines a 4-year action research study into student engagement with international experience from Europe to Korea. It describes how students' engagement was developed and exploited through structured cycles of action research intervention and analyses short-term results for students and institutions. Experiencing 'inertia' in students' behavioral engagement towards international opportunities, emotional engagement was employed to help students invest in their learning, go beyond expectations and relish the challenge of studying and working abroad. Using the 'scaffolding' L&T approach and other best practice, a series of 'support points' required by a student in the process of application / preparation were pinpointed. The importance of guidance from a teacher or more competent peer were important as students entered their 'zones of proximal development' to consider and manage living abroad. The results show rapidly increasing participation in specific international experience opportunities and enduring staff collaboration. A developed theory of student engagement is proposed.

Keywords: student engagement, scaffolding, international mobility

**1. Introduction**

Student engagement is important for three reasons: it mediates and explains the relationship between motivation and achievement, changes in engagement produce changes in the learning environment and also produce changes in motivation, as students' take action not only

to learn but also to meet psychological needs (Reeve, 2012). The study of student engagement started in the 1930s with Tyler considering 'time on task' (Tyler, 1949). Pace wrote on 'quality of effort' in the 1960s (Pace, 1982), and in the 1980s Astin (1985) researched 'student involvement', Tinto (1988) 'social and academic integration' and Chickering & Gamson (1987) 'good practice'

in undergraduate education. Student engagement as a concept encompassing all of these was first identified by Laird & Kuh (2005). Described as a sociological and psychological concept (Kahu, 2013), it is related to high quality learning outcomes (Smith & Worsfold, 2015) resulting in a sense of belonging, enjoyment, academic achievement and the development of a social network (Brownell & Swaner, 2009).

Humanistic and constructivist approaches to education (Freire, 1972 & Piaget, 1970) and a 'holistic' approach to internationalisation (Robson and Turner, 2007) underpin our personal philosophies of L&T. Dewey's (1916) ideas about democracy and social reform through education provide guiding principles: HE not only as a way to gain knowledge, but rather as a way for a student to learn how to live, realise their full potential and use their entrepreneurial skills and talent for the greater good. Dewey proposed that a university is a socially collaborative institution through which social reform should take place. This was particularly important for us as internationalists. The need for intercultural understanding and international knowledge has become an urgent priority (Bartell, 2003). International competence is now critical to a nation's health – "*a generalized necessity rather than an option for the tier of societal elites as in the past*" (p.49). Management is increasingly a cultural rather than technical activity (Laughton & Ottewill, 2000) and cultural awareness is becoming a differentiating factor in graduate employability (Archer & Davison, 2008).

We equate international mobility with social mobility and believe that developing global citizens is one way in which universities contribute to society. We have defined engagement as 'individual student learning' and students' engagement with 'structure and process' (Trowler, 2010), focusing on

engagement for equality and social justice. This working paper outlines a 4-year action research study into student engagement with international mobility from Europe to Korea and how we both exploited and developed students' talent through structured cycles of intervention.

## **2. Theoretical Underpinning**

### **2.1 Experiential and Situated Learning**

As HE adapts to new expectations from students, experiential-learning in business and accounting programs has become crucial (Clark & White, 2010). Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), influenced by Dewey and Piaget, proposes that knowledge is developed through experience and the transformation of that experience. Experience can be concrete or abstract conceptualisation, Transformation of that experience is achieved in one of two ways: reflective observation or active experimentation. This is often a cycle. This theory takes a holistic approach to the learning process, including cognition, environmental factors and emotions. A holistic approach to internationalization (Jones & Brown, 2007) offers enhanced opportunities for authentic experience and learning: students are motivated by its relevance to their lives outside, are exposed to different settings and perspectives, learn to assimilate and connect unfamiliar knowledge and develop the flexibility to work across disciplinary and cultural boundaries (international competence). This cannot be provided through conventional teaching methods. Situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) refers to the acquisition of professional skills and is often applied to apprenticeships and other 'work experience'. Central is the concept of the community of practice or the social situation in which learning occurs. Learning is a social process whereby

knowledge is co-constructed and situated in a specific context. Rankin (2016) identified the four major elements of situated learning as content (eg facts) although retention of facts is not important, context (as a platform for reviewing learning experiences), community (for sharing and interaction) and participation (for the exchange of ideas etc). In situated-learning, achievement is attained through authentic experience of real situations (such as living abroad) and success is directly related to effort and support received. The vicarious experiences of social role models are important as motivators, as is verbal persuasion from a knowledgeable, credible supporter.

## 2.2 Self-Efficacy & Scaffolding

Self-efficacy is a concept based in part on ‘mastery experiences’ (Bandura, 1993). It is an individual’s judgement of their own ability in a situation, dependent on their skills and the precise circumstances. Strong self-efficacy means challenges are to be mastered not avoided, failure is due to external factors and can be overcome and it is linked with better mental health. Weak self-efficacy leads to a focus on missing skills and a loss of faith in oneself after failure. Mental health is poorer. As well as through successful ‘mastery experiences’, self-efficacy can be developed through ‘vicarious experience of social models’ which involves witnessing someone similar succeeding and therefore believing you too can be successful. Lastly, self-efficacy can be facilitated by someone’s encouragement and positive belief. In an academic setting, higher perceived abilities by a parent or teacher in a student leads to the students sharing the belief (Bandura, 1993). This can be termed ‘instructional scaffolding’ (Bruner, 1960) – support by an instructor through a learning process, facilitating student-centred learning, deeper and more efficient than teacher-led. Scaffolding

requires collaborative interaction between student and instructor. The student should operate in their ‘zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky, 1978) – the domain between what the student can do with support (the pedagogical stage) and independent ability (the expert stage) (Ellis & Worthington, 1994). This ‘instructor’ does not have to be a professional educator, but simply a ‘More Knowledgeable Other’ (Janneke, Monique & Beishuizen, 2010) or MKO. A core element to scaffolding is that MKO support is gradually removed from the student, as a scaffold is from a building under construction. The aim is that the student will operate independently. It is important in experiential learning, using scaffolding to develop self-efficacy, that assessment in educational settings is authentic. ‘Authentic assessment’ (Scheurman & Newman, 1998) measures ‘intellectual accomplishments that are worthwhile, significant and meaningful’ and often reflects the value of learning beyond the educational setting. It can be described as ‘backwards design’ (Muller, 2013) as the curriculum follows the assessment. The aim is to assess if a student’s knowledge or skill can be used outside the classroom and it can have significant positive affect on student engagement.

## 2.3 Student Engagement

Krause (2005) suggests that ‘inertia’ in students is not active disengagement but rather “*doing nothing*” where students “*do not actively pursue opportunities to engage in their learning community*” and “*do not see the need to waver from their familiar path to engage with people, activities or opportunities...*”. Three stages of engagement were identified by Fredricks (2011): behavioural (normal involvement, absence of disruption), emotional (interest, enjoyment and belonging) and cognitive (investment ‘beyond’ and relishing challenge)

which applies both in educational settings and outside of them. These are influenced by teacher support (scaffolding), peer relationships (community of practice and self-efficacy), structure and task characteristics. This paper now continues to describe how these concepts were used to construct an action research methodology enhance student engagement in challenging international mobility opportunities.

### **3. Action Research Approach**

#### **3.1 Context and Principles**

This research was conducted at universities in the UK and Poland in specific national and social contexts. In the UK, the university setting was a provincial, post-1992 university where a third of students are from the surrounding region, a third from working-class homes and 15% from areas with little tradition of higher education. There are over 90 different nationalities on campus and students all pay tuition fees ranging between £9,000 and £25,000 per annum. For this reason, most ‘home’ students borrow money and work part-time during their university courses. Participation in international mobility is relatively low. In Poland, 75% of students study at a public university such as the context of this study and most on a full-time programme free-of-charge, often combining bachelor and masters level study. However, there are much lower levels of international students with only 2% on campus, while mobility participation is higher.

The study formed an element of the Korean-European Union Degree Opportunities for Students (KEUDOS) programme (2012-16), funded with 790,000 euros by the ‘Industrialized Countries Instrument – Education Cooperation Programme’ (ICI-ECP), launched to support joint mobility and degree opportunities between the EU and

Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. (Koprowski, 2015). The project, led by Budapest University of Technology & Economics, included six other international partners: Chonnam National University and Kyungpook National University in South Korea, the University of Warsaw and Warsaw University of Technology in Poland, the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia and the University of Northumbria in the UK. Focused on business, IT and engineering degrees, KEUDOS offered undergraduate exchange students the opportunity to earn a ‘dual degree’ from their home and ‘host’ university (i.e. two degrees) and also to complete an internship abroad, eliminating the normal forced choice between study abroad and work experience during a sandwich year. *“Students usually have to choose between getting international study and a UK workplace internship but in KEUDOS they can work and study simultaneously”*, reported a project manager (Northumbria, 2015) reported. In total, 143 students participated. Funding also supported staff mobility to manage and build institutional partnerships and collaborative research. 33 academic and administrative staff participated. KEUDOS was preceded by the ‘Study & Internship Program for European and Korean Students’ (SAIPEKS) project (2008-11), also funded by the European Union and South Korean government through ICI-ECP (Pearce et al., 2021a). It was succeeded by the ‘Global Entrepreneurial Talent Management’ Research & Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE) Project funded by Horizon 2020 (Pearce et al. 2021b).

Fundamentally, we did not accept the commonly held belief that European students are reluctant to go to Asia, despite the statistics showing that Asia hosted only 13% of globally mobile students compared to 46% in Europe (Grabher et al., 2014). This conviction came from our personal

experiences as an exchange students and staff and their personal and professional value. We suspected that this negative attitude within was self-fulfilling. The real barriers to EU-Asian mobility did not lie with the students. Based on our own values, the work described in this research was based on the premise that positive benefits can accrue from international and cross-cultural experiences. We fulfilled what Greenwood & Levin (2007) consider a fundamental contribution of action researchers: *“The ability to ask counter-*

*intuitive questions, to approach issues from the “outside”, and to question pet explanations”* (p.120).

Such questioning of established practice may have organisational benefits when a ‘step-change’ is required (Blackwell & Blackmore, 2003). Going beyond the ‘encouragement’ of mobility so often found in HE strategy documents, our work focused on implementation and impact.

### 3.2 Cycles & Support Points

Table 1: Structure of Student Cohorts in the KEUDOS Project

Stages→ Year ↓	Recruitment / Preparation	In- country	Return	Post- graduate
2012/13	Cohort 1			
2013/14	Cohort 2	Cohort 1		
2014/15	Cohort 3	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	
2015/16		Cohort 3	Cohort 2	Cohort 1
2016/17			Cohort 3	Cohort 2
2017- present				Cohort 3

Three cohorts of British and Polish exchange students were followed through four yearlong action research cycles of recruitment/preparation (undergraduate year 2), Korean experience (year 3), return home

(final year) to the UK or Poland and post-graduation. This structure is set out in Table 1.

To develop international experience in ‘home’ students, we sought out methods of experiential-and situated-learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Integrating recruits with incoming international students in various ways, we found none was adequate to

develop authentic global citizens. Instead, we set out to build students' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993) - the motivation and confidence - to participate in the KEUDOS programme and to provide them with appropriate opportunities. We devised a series of support points in a 'Pre-Step' (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) (Pre-recruitment) and each action research cycle. These are set out in Table 2 and involve the use of social media available and popular at the time to facilitate informal collaboration

through Facebook groups, post-modern 'retro-marketing' techniques, social initiatives such as a 3-way buddy scheme (previous/current outgoing exchanger, current candidate and current incoming exchanger), a community of practice and authentic assessment.

Table 2: Scaffolding Support Points in Action Research Cycles

<b>Stages→ Support Points↓</b>	<b>Pre- recruitment</b>	<b>Recruitment /Preparation</b>	<b>In-country</b>	<b>Return</b>	<b>Post-Graduate</b>
<b>Social Media</b>	<b>Facebook page</b>	<b>Facebook groups</b>	<b>Facebook groups</b>	<b>Facebook groups</b>	<b>Alumni Facebook group</b>
<b>Retro marketing</b>	<b>Tricksterism: Employability Presentation / Story brochure</b>	<b>Secrecy: Selection Events, Closed Groups</b>	<b>Amplification: Peer-to-peer mentoring</b>	<b>Exclusivity: Maximising Employability coaching</b>	<b>Entertainment: Alumni stories</b>
<b>Social</b>	<b>Public "study abroad" fair Open door policy Community of practice</b>	<b>3-way buddy scheme Open door policy Community of Practice</b>	<b>3-way buddy scheme Open door policy Community of Practice</b>	<b>3-way buddy scheme Open door policy Community of Practice</b>	<b>Alumni Network</b>
<b>Assessment</b>		<b>On-line prep portfolio</b>	<b>Placement Portfolio</b>	<b>Dissertation</b>	

## 4. Results Discussion

### 4.1 Immediate Student Outcomes

We measured (scale 1-5) the participating students' evaluation of their improvement after one year abroad based around the 'additional critical competencies' identified in the 'Global Graduates into Global Leaders' report (Diamond et al., 2013). The results are shown in Figures 1-3 below. Students are

transformed by their international, life-affirming learning experience. They often identify their time abroad as the best feature of their university experience. Originally quietly convinced that going abroad was a 'good thing' and building self-efficacy as a single credible supporter, we have been

overwhelmed by students' positivity and their willingness to act as self-efficacy role-models to younger students, wishing to remain engaged in the programme long after they return to their home universities and graduate. The tangible effects on their confidence, global outlook and employability are marked:

*“Before my placement, I was content to finish university and find employment within my hometown, Newcastle. Returning from the*

*placement, I knew that there was no going back to a simple life in Newcastle for me. I moved to London to find a job in the corporate world. My international experience allowed me to obtain long term secondments within my company's offices in Zurich and Miami. Six years later, I have transferred my life to Switzerland where I work internationally for the world's largest Corporate Insurance Broker.”*

*Student Participant*

Figure 1: Keudos Student Feedback re Professional Development

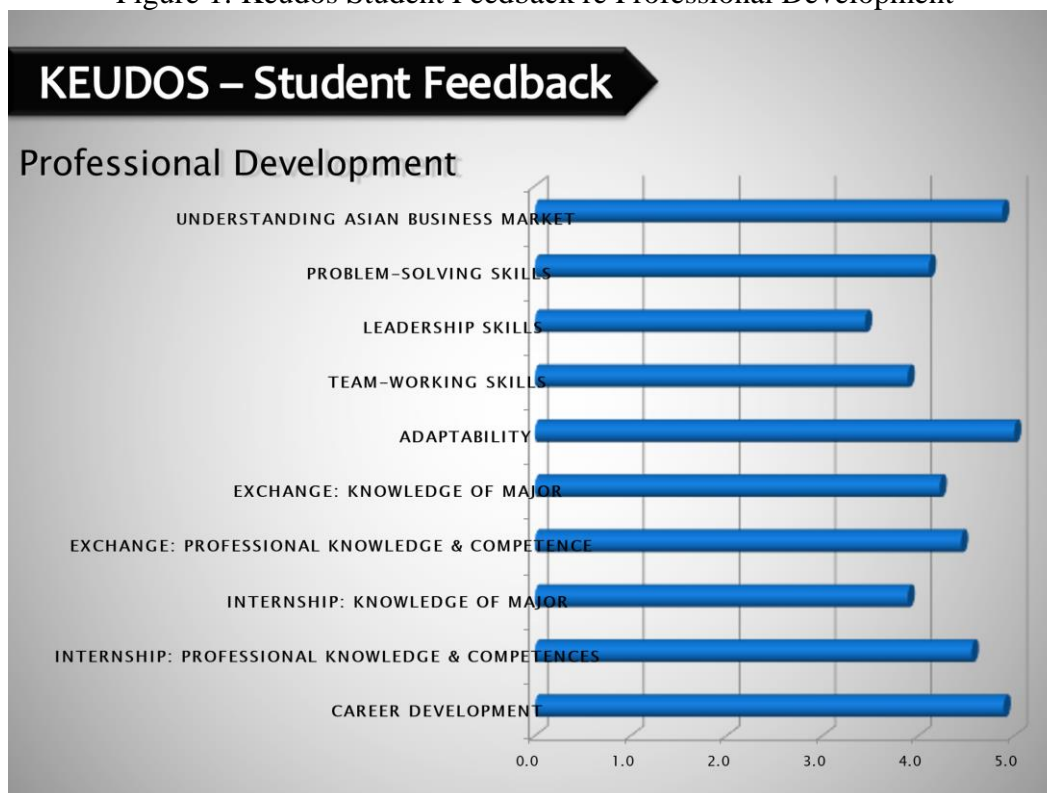




Figure 2: Keudos Student Feedback re Intercultural Competency Development

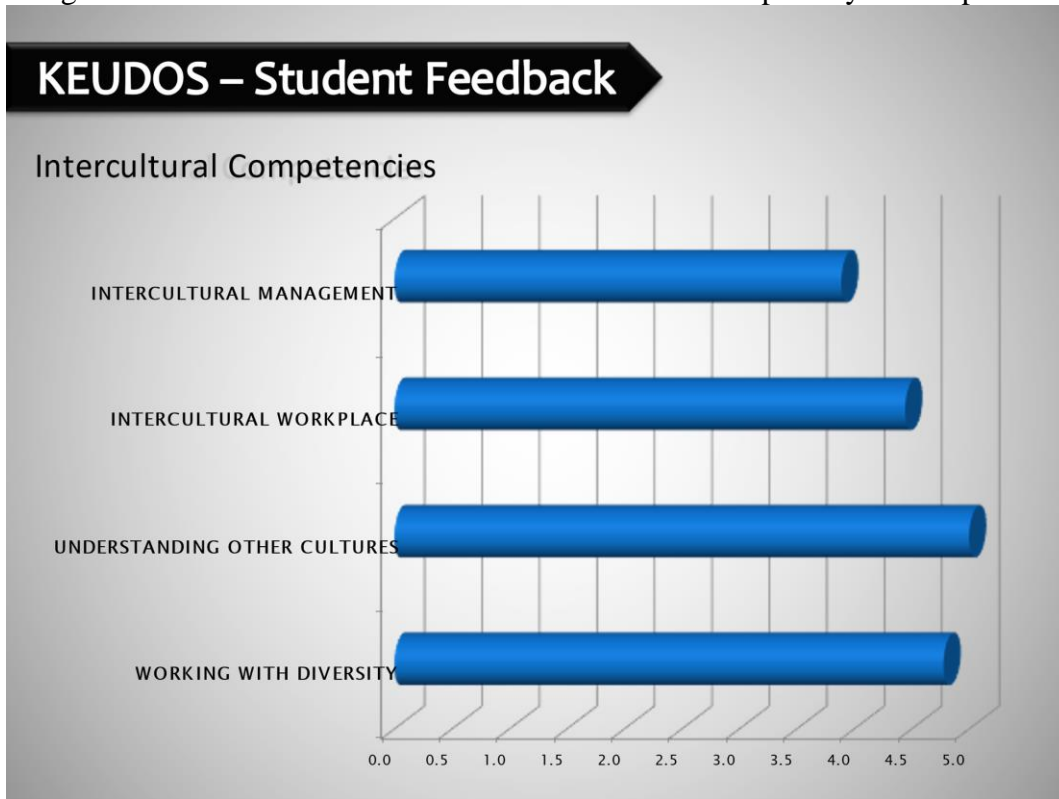
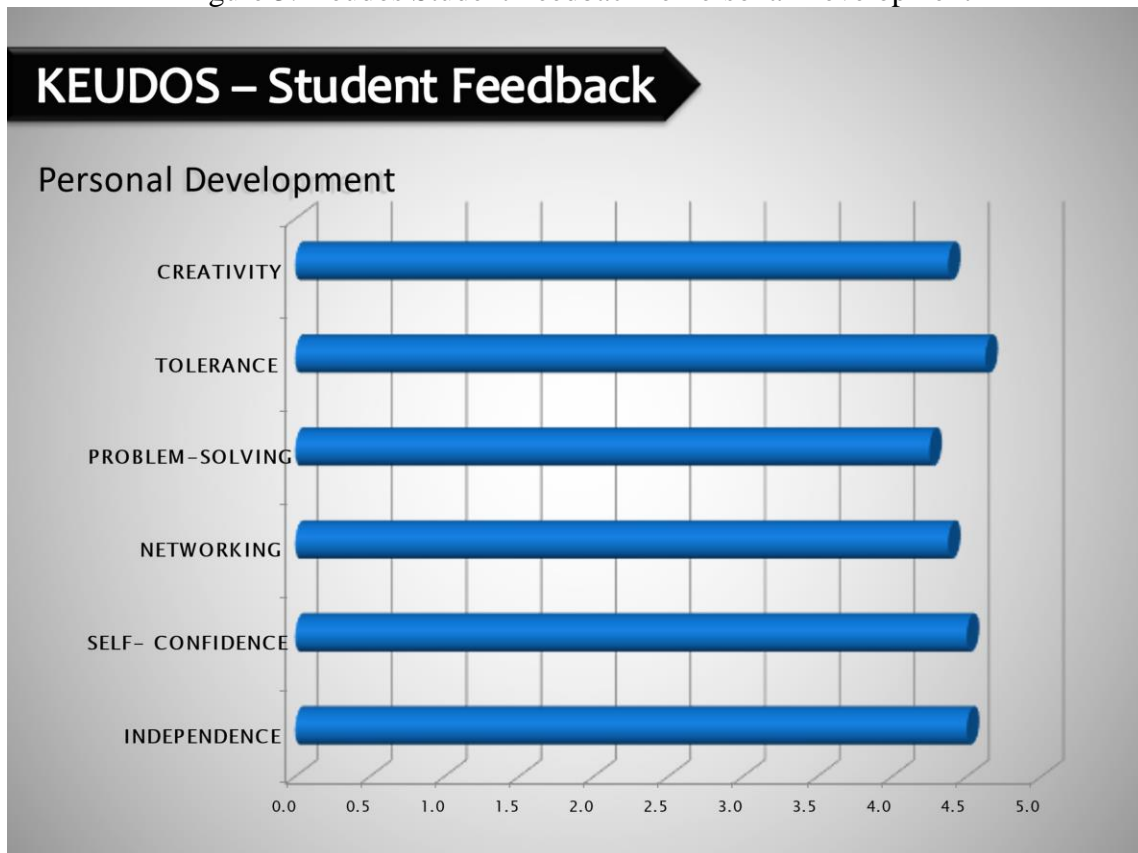


Figure 3: Keudos Student Feedback re Personal Development



*Korea was never a country I considered visiting but after attending a presentation on Asian destinations hosted by [two staff], I was gripped. Northumbria staff are so enthusiastic and passionate about the project and I got a clear outline of what to expect. I became very adventurous and resilient to challenge and change. I'm also really interested in football and cooking – two things Korea has in plentiful supply. Living in Korea allowed me to experience a new way of living, rewriting the norm I had come to expect in England and challenged my views on how best to live my life. It's had such a positive impact on my personality, my work ethic and my taste in music, food and sport. My communication skills have developed as have my organisational skills and I've developed a sense of maturity."*

*Student Participant*

#### **4.2 Longer Student Outcomes**

Anecdotally, the 'Keudos experience' has exercised significant influence on and delivered various benefits for participating students after graduation. The British student above won a national competition for a post-graduate Korean government scholarship which allowed him to study intensive Korean in the country for a year, in order to reach the standard necessary to study at postgraduate level for the next two years. He was also accepted onto the Frontier Business Administration course at the Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul.

Another student returned to Korea after graduation to teach English as a foreign language. He taught English in a school for blind children and was featured on Korean national television. Several graduates have won Korean government scholarships to return to the country for post-graduate study in Korean and several others now have roles

in global industry focussed specifically on operating in or with Korea. Two Europe-Korea couples who met through the Keudos programme have been married.

#### **4.3 Institutional Outcomes**

Extending the 'scaffolding' concept we used to recruit students initially, we built equal operational expertise in institutional teams. We did this by involving them in the management of the project, encouraging their contribution and (unusually) facilitating their international partner visits as we met the challenge of scaling up from ten to three hundred students in the UK, for example. Their resulting confidence in implementing an 'open-door' policy for advice was so successful that staff team members were interchangeable as self-efficacy supporters, providing high accessibility for maximum impact on a growing number of students:

*The most important thing for me was having a connection to people back home, such as lecturers, who were there to offer support and gave me the strength to get through the hard parts in Hong Kong.*

*Student Participant*

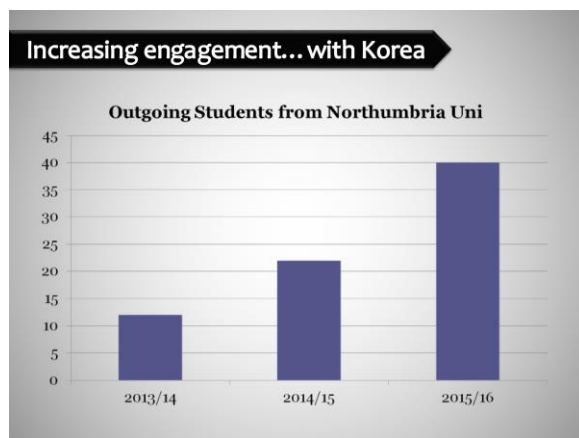
We found peer-to-peer learning increasingly effective and efficient as participating numbers grew (see Figure 4): students and interested academic colleagues were organised into communities-of-practice from Year 1. Returning students in Year 4, working with incoming students and interested staff, volunteered to co-ordinate meetings, social events and to run social media groups which could then include alumni and students currently abroad.

*"Historically, the reputation of UK universities has been that students are not interested in studying abroad – but this*

*project has shown that for us, it's completely the opposite. In the last couple of years, Korea has become the most popular destination with students and we are fantastically successful in terms of the number of students that go to Korea. The participating students are so enthusiastic about the experience and very active in supporting younger students and encouraging them to go for the opportunity."*

*UK Programme Manager*

Figure 4: Cohort Growth Rate in UK (Stage 2)



In 2014, KEUDOS was shortlisted for the Times Higher 'International Collaboration of the Year Award' and has also been nominated for the European Association for International Education's (EAIE) Best Practice in International award this year. The results and learning from the KEUDOS project have been presented at the annual conferences of the European Association of International Education (2017, 2016, 2015) and the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education (2015), the China-Central & Eastern Europe Cross-cultural Dialogue on Education & Business (2015), the International Conference on Social Collaboration & Shared Values in Korea (2016), the Annual Conference of the UK Academy of Marketing (2016), the "3

Rivers" North-East Learning & Teaching Annual Conference (2015) and the Annual Conference of the New Initiatives & Challenges in Europe Network (2016), facilitating the global impact of the research. Korean universities hosted KEUDOS graduation events attended by the University President, UK Ambassador to Korea' director of the British Council for Korea and the Head of the EU Delegation to the Republic of Korea (KNU, 2016).

*While the KEUDOS project includes various other EU partners, the role of the UK and Polish universities in sending so many double degree candidates has been pivotal in creating a project momentum that has attracted special attention from both the EU and the Korean government in terms of academic innovation. This result would surely not have been possible without the strong and consistent support of staff. The combination of engaged academic leadership and effective administrative support has made all the difference in terms of promoting the KEUDOS programme. As a result, this double degree programme is changing lives and impacting career choices in ways none of us could have predicted, especially for British students!*

*Assistant VP International, South Korea*

As attitudes changed within the universities, it had a positive impact on the institutions' confidence and work/study abroad opportunities were expanded. We had now to work with a much larger number of programme leaders and directors. Again applying the 'scaffolding' approach to this wider team, we identified the required support points for academic staff and acted as mentors as they became more involved in promoting study abroad generally. The institutions involved in KEUDOS were later awarded 1 million euros by the European

Union's Horizon 2020 programme for the development of research capacity in international staff exchange and another 1

million euros for strategic partnerships to develop of innovation capacity under Erasmus+.

## 5. Conclusion

Experiencing 'inertia' [(Krause, 2005) in students' behavioural engagement (Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004) towards international opportunities, we used emotional engagement to help students invest in their learning, go beyond expectations and relish the challenge of studying and working abroad: cognitive engagement and entrepreneurial traits. Achieving this through the 'scaffolding' L&T approach (Bruner, 1960), and best practice developed by Kruse & Brubaker (2007), we pinpointed a series of 'support points' required by a student in the process of application / preparation and identified the importance of guidance from a teacher or more competent peer as students entered their 'zones of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978) to consider and manage living abroad. This builds on Mann's (2001) identification of individual staff interventions as crucial to student engagement. These included ensuring academic credibility to avoid 'academic tourism' (Gardner et al, 2009). For example, inspired by the concept of 'authentic assessment' (Scheurman & Newman, 1998), we developed an integrated preparation and reflection assessment strategy using on-line portfolio technology, with appropriate interventions from the study

abroad team pre-departure, in-country and post-return. Giving students the opportunity to reflect upon progress is essential to authentic-learning's metacognition: assessment is integrated seamlessly into the learning task (working/studying abroad) in order to reflect 'real-world' assessment. Much of what students learn while abroad is unintended and so setting learning outcomes can be challenging.

Based on our experiences and results in driving participation in study abroad opportunities – and the particularly challenging Korean destination in institutions with diverse students - we developed a new approach to student engagement, based on the existing working of Krause and Fredricks. "From Inertia to Beyond" uses emotional engagement in the form of the excitement created by the scaffolding support points. The process (Figure 5) takes students from 'inertia' (in the form of behavioural engagement) to achieving beyond their expectations and succeed in Korea (cognitive engagement).



Figure 5: From ‘inertia’ to beyond’ by the authors, based on Krause (2005) and Fredricks et al (2004).

### 5.1 Limitations & Suggestions for Further Research

The data from this research was generated from a single project initiative in two universities over a limited time period. The data are designed to be transferable by the reader as opposed to generalisable and so data about the context is provided. The research does not take into account macro-environmental factors which influence student attitudes and will change over time. The choice of social media platform was appropriate at the time

But this is a very rapidly developing and changing areas which would need to be updated and considered in more detail when replicated.

Further research to apply the theory and the approach to further cohorts of students, from different backgrounds and to different locations, would add to the evidence. More quantitative data on the effects would enhance understanding and an investigation into longer terms effects on graduates and institutions would be valuable.

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